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# Nicaragua foes lobby Congress

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WASHINGTON—It's not just the Reagan administration that is lobbying Congress on the issue of financial aid to the anti-Sandinista rebels in Nicaragua.

Quietly, largely unnoticed, both sides in the conflict there have been canvassing Capitol Hill looking for sympathetic legislators.

In the last few days, those making the rounds have included a senior Nicaraguan government official, Deputy Foreign Minister Victor Hugo Tinoco, arguing against support for the contras, and perhaps the best-known rebel leader, Eden Pastora Gomez, making the case for himself and his fellow contras, whom the administration calls "freedom fighters."

As U.S. involvement has grown in Central America, so too has the attention given Congress by governments and insurgent groups in the region.

Both sides in El Salvador's conflict, for instance, have made the rounds on the Hill looking for support. One of the Nicaraguan contra groups keeps a full-time lobbyist here to keep in touch with Congress and the administration as well as private backers who have become an important source of money.

"It's a rather odd situation to see the various representatives of government and insurgent groups working the Hill," a congressional aid said.

The pace of activity surrounding aid to the Nicaraguan contras is sure to pick up, because March 1 was the trigger date after which the White House may ask Congress to make available \$14 million already appropriated for the Ni-

caraguan rebels but tied up pending a vote by both houses of Congress to resume funding the "secret" war.

The public lobbying is all the more remarkable because it involves funding that is supposed to be "covert."

President Reagan has led the administration's push for Congress to end its cutoff of that "covert" aid to the rebel fighters. He has been joined by Vice President George Bush and Secretary of State George Shultz in very public advocacy of the rebel cause.

"We are asking Congress only to release a few dollars to a brave people who are striving for the same democratic ideals and freedoms our forefathers fought for in the American Revolution," said Bush, speaking last week in Texas to the Austin Council on Foreign Affairs.

Reagan, escalating his rhetoric in an interview made public Monday, said the Sandinista regime is "not a government" but a "faction" of the 1979 revolution against dictator Anastasio Somoza "that has taken power at gunpoint."

Reagan told Business Week magazine: "Under the United Nations charter and the charter of the Organization of American States, there is every reason for us to be helping the people that want the original goals of the revolution instituted."

Administration officials acknowledge that they don't have enough support in Congress to free the \$14 million, but they are struggling to find a formula that would shift the balance in their favor. They have largely ruled out overt aid, a step they consider too close to an act of war by the U.S. against the Managua government, and are looking at alternatives, such as

funneling money through Honduras.

"How we should support them is a question we can debate," Shultz said. "That we should support them is clear."

House Speaker Thomas O'Neill [D., Mass.] said he doesn't think the administration will be able to round up enough votes in the House, which has repeatedly voted against aid to the contras. "I don't believe he is going to get any funds, overt or covert," O'Neill said last week.

A new initiative put forward by Nicaragua, to send home 100 Cuban military advisers and suspend arms purchases, was dismissed by the White House as nothing more than an attempt to "influence" Congress.

"If members of the United States Congress will recognize what appears to be a fairly sophisticated effort to influence them on Central American aid, I am certain they will reject it," said White House spokesman Larry Speakes.

The proposal by Managua, as well as an invitation from Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega for a congressional delegation to visit, were discussed with key congressmen by Tinoco in a week-long visit here. Ortega even telephoned at least one congressman here to set up an appointment for Tinoco.

Rep. Michael Barnes [D., Md.], chairman of the House Foreign Affairs subcommittee dealing with Central America, met with Tinoco and said afterward that the Nicaraguan initiative "offers hope." But he said he made it clear to Tinoco that Nicaragua must institute internal democratic reforms if it is to meet even the concern of congressional democrats.

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